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Research Shows Homework Does Boost Academic Achievement; But Overemphasizing Grades And Performance May Lead To Cheating

ScienceDaily (Mar. 4, 1998) — **Stressing Competition May Drive Adolescents To Cheat In School**

Adolescents who perceive that schools and classroom teachers define achievement primarily in terms of grades and performance are more likely to cheat and believe that cheating is acceptable. Psychologist Eric M. Anderman, Ph.D., and graduate students Tripp Griesinger, M.S., and Gloria Westerfield, M.S., of the University of Kentucky studied 285 middle school science students and examined the link between cheating in science class and the motivational variables behind such behavior. Their findings indicate that students who report cheating tend to:

- worry about school
- perceive their school as focused on grades and ability
- believe they can obtain some type of reward for doing well in class
- attribute failure in school to outside circumstances
- avoid using deep-level cognitive processing strategies, such as trying different ways to solve a problem.

When students believe they will receive an extrinsic benefit for doing well in class, such as getting out of homework or other assignments, they will be more likely to cheat. Dr. Anderman, lead author of the study, notes that "it is ironic that many students view the reward for doing well in the classroom as being able to get out of additional learning activities." The researchers point out that if the value of the reward is more important to the student than the academic task itself, the student may consider cheating acceptable.

The study found that demographic variables, including gender, were unrelated to cheating. On an individual level, students with a personal extrinsic motivational orientation (for example, doing work only because it is required or only caring about getting the right answer to a problem) were likely to believe that cheating is an acceptable behavior, according to the study. The researchers found that students who ascribed poor performance to a variety of external factors, including blaming others for their failure and making excuses for poor scholastic performance, were likely to report that they cheated and considered their behavior to be acceptable. Conversely, students who reported using deep-level cognitive processing strategies in doing their science work, such as trying different ways to solve a problem or asking themselves questions to make sure they understand their work, were less likely to cheat.

Learning environments that stress competition and grades may cause some students to see cheating as a

means of survival, according to the authors. Previous studies have demonstrated that middle-school environments can be changed to de-emphasize the weight placed on performance and ability. The authors suggest that changing the school and classroom environment to focus less on testing, grades, and ability may lead to lower levels of cheating, for students may have less of an incentive to cheat if schools reduce emphasis on competition. "This study has strong implications considering President Clinton's discussion of moving toward the initiation of national testing for schoolchildren," Dr. Anderman says. "An unforeseen negative outcome may be increases in cheating due to this increased emphasis on testing."

Article: "Motivation and Cheating During Early Adolescence" by Eric M. Anderman, Ph.D., Tripp Griesinger, M.S., and Gloria Westerfield, M.S., University of Kentucky, in Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 90, No. 1.

(Full text available from the APA Public Affairs Office.)

Yes Johnny; Doing Your Homework Is Important

The more homework students complete, especially from grades six to twelve, the better they do in school, according to research conducted by psychologists Harris Cooper, Ph.D., James J. Lindsay, Ph.D., and Scott Greathouse, Ph.D., of the University of Missouri -- Columbia and psychologist Barbara Nye, Ph.D., of Tennessee State University. The research also demonstrates that parental attitudes toward homework play an important role in their children's education.

The study, which is the first to incorporate attitudinal measures into an analysis of the link between homework and achievement by examining the beliefs parents, teachers, and students hold regarding homework, represents an initial attempt to gather estimates of homework behavior from three sources. The study relates teacher, student, and parent reports of the amount of homework teachers assigned and the proportion of homework students completed to students' standardized test scores and class grades. The psychologists obtained complete data sets from over 700 "triads," which they defined as consisting of a teacher, at least one student in a teacher's class, and one parent of that student. Homework behavior was analyzed from students in second through twelfth grades.

While the amount of homework completed by students was positively related to their achievement in school, the study demonstrates that the relationship between homework completed and achievement is strongest at upper grades and for teacher-assigned grades (as opposed to performance on standardized tests).

At lower grades, teachers may determine the amount of homework they assign young students based on their own beliefs regarding its merit, yet the authors note that increased out-of-school assignments may lead to unfavorable attitudes toward homework among elementary school students. "Although the benefits of study at home for young children may not be immediately evident, we support assigning homework to younger elementary schoolchildren due to its potential long-term developmental impact, for it helps elementary schoolers develop proper study skills, which, in turn, influence grades," says Dr. Cooper, lead author of the study. However, the authors advise that teachers should attempt to ensure that outside assignments are of a proper length for the developmental level of their students, since too much homework can lead to fatigue and academic disinterest.

The authors note that parental attitudes with respect to study at home have direct, positive effects on their children's attitudes toward homework and, at upper grades, on their children's classroom achievement.

Attitudes about homework may be transmitted from parent to child, and parental involvement in the homework process affects their child's education. The authors assert that "school teachers and educational policymakers should interpret these results to mean that efforts to improve parental attitudes toward homework are likely to pay off."

Since over 90 percent of the study's respondents were White, the authors maintain that future researchers need to involve families that are typically underrepresented in homework studies. Additional studies should "broaden the nature of the criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of homework," and the psychologists contend that certain intermediate outcomes, such as improved motivation and effective study habits should be used to assess the impact of homework, especially in younger students.

Article: "Relationships Among Attitudes About Homework, Amount of Homework Assigned and Completed, and Student Achievement" by Harris Cooper, Ph.D., James J. Lindsay, Ph.D., and Scott Greathouse, Ph.D., University of Missouri-- Columbia, and Barbara Nye, Ph.D., of Tennessee State University in Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 90, No. 1.

(Full text available from the APA Public Affairs Office)

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Adapted from materials provided by American Psychological Association.

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